

The Reason for the Season

Why we do what we do

December 2018



GEORGIA VOCATIONAL
REHABILITATION AGENCY

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A Time to Reflect

By Executive Director Sean T. Casey



It's no secret that the season we look upon as a time for peace and reflection is far from quiet for many of us. There is the rush to find presents for each person on our list (and often the ensuing scramble when someone surprises us with a gift), the pressure to fit holiday gatherings around personal and family obligations, and often, the flurry of a multitude of end-of-year tasks at our jobs.

Numerous blogs and articles focus on decluttering our lives and using the holidays to re-center. I'll be using mine both to pause in thankfulness for a truly rewarding year at Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA) and also to focus on goals for the year ahead.

We do so much, serving clients and claimants, but every successful professional

knows there's always more each of us can do. We all have some area of improvement, some new initiative to implement, some vision of what kind of organization we'd like to be a part of in 2019.

Like any New Year's resolution, it's easy to set a well-intentioned goal and then fall off in a couple of months when our schedules are again dominated by the daily grind. I believe measurable benchmarks are an important tool for achievement, and I am thankful for the program experts implementing Operational Performance Improvement and the administrative leadership developing Key Performance Indicators to help us all self-assess. We can accomplish a lot in the year ahead. I think we're on the right path.

As each of you celebrate the holidays however you choose, please know I continue to hold a deep gratitude for our clients and the commitment of my coworkers.

Enjoy the peace and relaxation you have earned. I look forward to seeing what we accomplish in 2019!

— Sean T. Casey
GVRA Executive Director



Get to Know a Legislator

This Month We Feature Sharon Cooper



Born in Houston, Texas, Sharon Cooper is proud to have called Georgia home for over 38 years. She was married to the late Dr. Tom Cooper for more than 33 years. She was first elected in 1996 as the State

Representative for the 41st District of Georgia (now 43rd district).

In 2000, Sharon was chosen as legislator of the year by the Georgia Republican Party, and in 2002, she was elected Caucus Chairman by her Republican colleagues. In 2004, she was elected Majority Caucus Chairman making her the highest ranking woman in the Georgia House. In 2007, in response to her ever increasing committee responsibilities, Rep. Cooper assumed the role of Caucus Chair Emeritus.

Currently Rep. Cooper chairs the Health and Human Services committee, one of the busiest committees in the House. She was also appointed chairman of the Special Committee on Certificate of Need as well as chair of the Special Committee on Grady Hospital. Rep. Cooper is also a member of the Rules, Judiciary Non-Civil and Regulated Industries committees.

Rep. Cooper holds several degrees, including a B.S. in Child Development; a M.A. in Education and MSN in Nursing. She has written two textbooks on Psychiatric Nursing and in 1994, she authored

Taxpayer's Tea Party – a how-to book that encouraged the average citizen to become politically active. Recently, she was asked to update this book, available now in E-book.

A graduate of the first class of the Coverdell Leadership Institute, Rep. Cooper was able to pass a major revision of the state's stalking law while still in her freshman term. In 2002, A.G. Ashcroft appointed her to the President's 30-member, National Advisory Committee on Violence Against Women. In 2006, Cobb County Commission Chairman Sam Olens credited Rep. Cooper as being the major catalyst behind the creation of Cobb County Police Department's Domestic Violence Unit. She has also served on First Lady Mary Perdue's Advisory Committee on Foster Care.

Rep. Cooper continues to author and foster legislation that promotes improved health care for Georgians such as: the HIV Screening Bill for Pregnant Women, Georgia Smoke free Air Act, and the "Health Share" Volunteers in Medicine Act. Rep. Cooper has earned the reputation of being one of the hardest working legislators at the Capitol as well as being honest, straightforward and committed. Former governor and U.S. Senator Zell Miller called her "the little legislator that tells it like it is."

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP * Health and Human Services, Chair * Judiciary - Non Civil, Member * Regulated Industries, Member * Rules, Member



The Reason for the Season

GIB Plays Secret Santa

For the fifth year, employees at Georgia Industries for the Blind have come together to make the holidays that much more special for one south Georgia family.

Partnering with Decatur Community Cares, GIB was paired with a local family in need to play "Secret Santa", ensuring that the three children in the family received gifts come Christmas morning.

"Decatur Community Cares hears about the needs of the family from churches or neighbors, and you know there's a genuine

need there," said Teresa Roberts, GIB Plant Manager. "The program works because it focuses on people in our own community. We don't know who it is. We don't put a face to the person, but we know it's going to folks who need our help, and we're happy to do so."

Pictured below from left are GIB employees Stanley Olivent, Freddie Hartzog and Cornell Hamilton with the gifts collected this year for the organization's Secret Santa event.



DAS Employee of the Month

Congratulations as always!

*The following nomination was submitted by
Patty McMurray in the category of
Teamwork.*

"Roger consistently maintains a very low caseload. He routinely assists others in the unit on their caseloads by his own initiative. He is the unit's primary vendor specialist and has informally mentored new adjudicators in the unit. He can be counted on to assist where ever he is needed. Roger volunteered to have new trainees shadow him on the job this summer."

Thank you, Roger, for all that you do to make DAS one of the top-performing adjudication programs in the nation!



And the Winners Are ...

The GVRA Leadership Summit Winners



Congrats to the 2018 winners of the GVRA Leadership Summit Awards. They are (from left):

Leadership – Bernadette Amerein, Vocational Rehabilitation

Perseverance – Glenda Dunn, Disability Adjudication Services

Employee of the Year – Cheryl Leslie, Cave Spring

Executive Director's – Daniel Garnett, Administration

Rookie of the Year – Tia Ricks, Vocational Rehabilitation

Distinguished Service – Rebecca Weisenbach, Vocational Rehabilitation

Innovation & Creativity – Megon Steele, Roosevelt Warm Springs

Service Star – Savannah Bland, Vocational Rehabilitation, accepted by Dana Skelton-Sanders



Learning to Lead

The 2018 Leadership Summit



Above: Executive Director Sean T. Casey addresses attendees at the annual leadership summit.

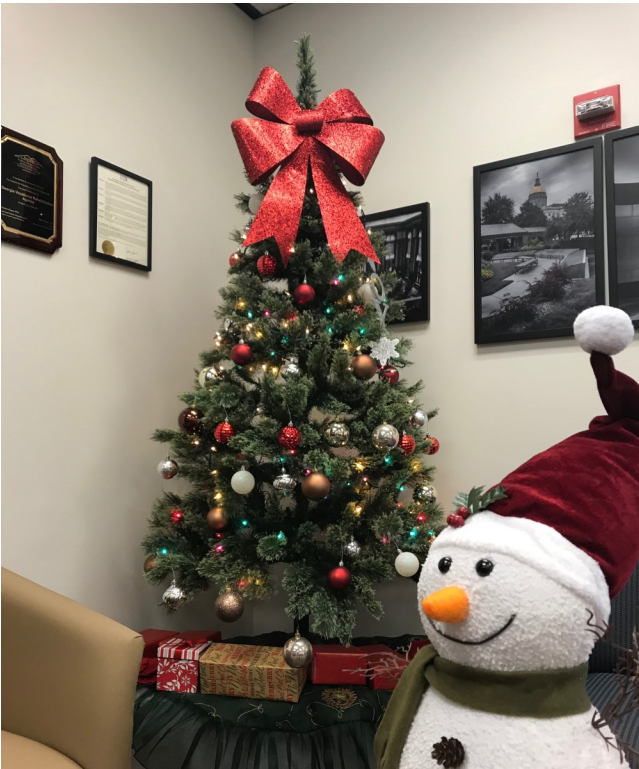


Below: Attendees network with coworkers at the third annual summit.



Ho Ho Holidays at GVRA

How We're Celebrating



Above: Holiday scenes around at the GVRA Administrative Offices.

Below: Office Assistant Candace Johnson and Counselor Assistant Jacara Searles show off their festive fireplace in the College Park Office.





Left: The Swainsboro office decked the halls recently with this GVRA-themed Christmas tree.

Bottom: The Gainesville VR office recently celebrated the season with a holiday luncheon.

A special thank you goes out to all staff members who helped make their office space festive this time of year. It makes the space that much more friendly and comfortable for clients coming in the door.



In Memoriam

Remembering Justin Pressley

SRC member Justin Pressley, 46 of Gainesville, passed away earlier this year at his home. He is remembered as someone who was dedicated to working with individuals with disabilities, and he will be missed by the SRC and the disability community as a whole.

"Justin's passion was evident since his earliest participation in the council," said SRC Chair Rossany Rios. "His knowledge and love for serving others will always be remembered."

A lifelong resident of Hall County, Justin had worked for 10 years in the banking industry starting at The Citizens Bank. After working there, he created two small businesses and was later an Olympic torch bearer in the 1996 Centennial Olympics.

His community service included serving as a founding Commissioner of the Georgia Brain and Spinal Cord Injury Trust Fund as well as serving as its first treasurer. He volunteered for 10 years as Vice President and Treasurer of Access Hall County, Inc., and co-founded the Access Center for Independent Living. Justin served on the advisory board of North Georgia Health Systems and was a founding board member of Our Neighbor, Inc. Justin had been involved in the disability rights movement since the early 90's with Adapt and the National Organization on Disability, and he was currently a Core Leader for Georgia for the National Participant Network.

Because of a supportive family, he had been able to live independently and was guided by an "independent living philosophy."

Justin's hobbies included hunting, fishing and

power soccer. He co-founded the North Georgia Screamin' Eagles in 2006 and had served on the marketing and tournament selection committees of the U.S. Power Soccer Association, in addition to being chair of the Georgia Games Power Soccer committee.

Survivors include his parents, Vicki and Danny Pressley; sister and brother-in-law, Heather and Lincoln Holcombe; brother and sister-in-law; Luke and Lori Pressley; nephews and nieces, Austin and Cooper Holcombe and Kaylee and Kamryn Pressley.



Ho ho ho!

Scenes from the Annual RWS Holiday Parade



Pictured are scenes from the Roosevelt Warm Springs Christmas Parade. The winning float, pictured below, was a recreation of the infamous camper from National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation.



The Devil in the Details

Client Finds Success in Auto Detailing

Waxing, vacuuming, polishing to a shine.

For some, getting our cars in top condition is a chore relegated to spare hours on the weekends. But if you love cars, it's both a career and an art.

For James Abshire, automotive is in his blood. His mother works for Jim Ellis Automotive, and he found a job there too as he was exploring what he wanted to do for a living. For a while, he spent a few hours a week as an Automotive Service Technician's helper. The experience got James' engine running, but he needed new challenges, and he also wanted to learn to live independently. That meant finding help with daily activities like cooking, driving, and money management. And then there were the interpersonal skills, which James also wanted to polish so he would thrive in the workplace.

James set his sights on Roosevelt Warm Springs (RWS), Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency's (GVRA) residential vocational training center in Meriwether County.

There, immersed in the rich legacy of founder Franklin Delano Roosevelt, students who are often away from home for the first time assess their interests and set career goals with counselors, career specialists and other support staff. James arrived on campus in February 2016.

James' assessment revealed a lot of potential. While he knew he processed information and communicated differently, he and his team discovered he is a hands on learner and gets better and better at tasks with practice. He identified a vocational goal, deciding he wanted to work in customized automotive detailing instead of going under the hood.

A whole spectrum of courses, in addition to those directly supplementing the vocational goal, are offered at RWS. Students can catch up on academic skills and receive support with living skills while they stay in the campus's college-style dorms. James spent around 18 months as a student before he was ready for a real-world challenge.

While he had originally wanted to go back to his former employer, the position he was interested in wasn't available. His career specialist set up an interview at Spirit Car Detail in Hiram, and at the end of August, he started his new job.

A job coach still helps James with some of the everyday adjustments that come with life's transitions, but Spirit Car Detail's new employee is a success.

"James is working as hard, if not harder, than the other employees," said the shop's owner, Keith Ko. "He is working independently. James is always on time and just a pleasure to work with."

Mr. Ko said he hopes GVRA will send him more people to interview and hire, and his support team could not be more proud of James' achievements. For this new worker, success was truly in the details.





Top left: James Abshire details a car.

Top right, from left to right: Paulette Johnson, Work Based Learning Specialist; Amanda Buckner, Certified Rehabilitation Counselor; James Abshire, Client; Chris Johnson, Auto Detailing Instructor.

Bottom, from left: James Abshire stands with Marc Jacobson, manager at Spirit Car Wash where James works.



A Success!

One VR Client's Story

By Team Lead Darreth Roby

Ronarious Jones is a 21-year-old young man who has overcome so much to find success. A graduate from John Hancock Academy in Sparta, Ronarious came to Vocational Rehabilitation with no work experience, but what he did have was an eagerness to work.



Ronarious told his counselor that he really wanted to be able purchase things for himself, be independent and become a responsible adult. Ronarious's mother said that after the initial meeting with the counselor, it seemed as though

he had a sense of pride, and he was really looking forward to the future. When Ronarious began with GVRA, he was very quiet and hesitant to talk. He participated in a Work Evaluation with Goodwill Industries, and that allowed him the opportunity to be in a work setting and prepare for what was to come. The Work Evaluation provided Ronarious and his counselor with vital information to determine services that would ultimately help him become successfully employed.

The VR counselor discussed vendors that provided supported employment in the area, and Ronarious chose FH Vocational Concepts as the vendor he would work with. A meeting was arranged for Ronarious to meet Fran Holmes, the owner of FH Vocational Concepts, to discuss his desire to work, the settings he was interested in and services he would receive from her and her staff members.

Ronarious was assigned a trainer to assist him with developing the skills required for him to become successfully employed. During his meetings with his trainer, they went over interviewing skills eye contact, handling conflict, and other valuable topics needed for him to be successful in work settings. Ronarious and his trainer completed applications and traveled to different job sites to see which ones he liked and ones that he disliked.

In March 2018, all of Ronarious's training and job search paid off when he was hired by Kroger in Milledgeville.

Ronarious and his mother were very excited about his new employment, though the road to success was a little challenging for Ronarious. His manager was temporarily moved to another store and this posed a bit of an obstacle. FH Vocational Concepts staff was right there to help Ronarious get back on track though, so he could continue on his path to success. After Ronarious received the extra help from FH Vocational Concepts, his confidence level increased, and he began to become more vocal with coworkers. Ronarious takes pride in his work and loves the fact that he is able to purchase things he wants and the fact that he is able to spoil his little sister every now and then.

Ronarious Jones is well liked for his politeness and respect for customers and coworkers alike. His supervisors are very pleased with his work, and he is often given a few extra tasks that he completes with no problems.

VR is proud to have been a part of Ronarious Jones's success story.



A Spoonful of Sugar

New CVS Mock Store Opens at RWS



Above: Lee Brinkley-Bryan speaks at the grand opening of the CVS Mock Store on the campus of Roosevelt Warm Springs.

Below: Tiffany Hudson is interviewed by Sign 1 News at the mock store opening.



**“From a small
seed, a mighty
trunk may
grow.
~ Aeschylus**

Your Newsletter

By Communications Manager John Boan

As always, I want to use this space to thank everyone who contributed to this month's newsletter. It's a premier publication for an organization our size, and it wouldn't be possible without those who help guide its content.

With that in mind, I want to extend the invitation to everyone reading this to submit stories or pictures or whatever you think might make a good addition to the newsletter.

If you have any ideas, please email me at john.boan@gvs.ga.gov. Thanks as always for everything you do, and my office door is always open (I'm in a cube).

It takes a village to put this publication together, and we want to include as many of our partners and those in the disability community as possible. So let us hear from you!

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